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Midwifery Bound

Dissertation

1811 apr 1

On

The Causes, Symptoms and Treatment

of

Amenorrhœa.

Submitted as

An Inaugural Thesis

For

The Degree of Doctor of Medicine

By Elias Wills Napier

Of Nashville

Tennessee

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To

Revs.

Trustee

Univers

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An

Inaugural Dissertation

For

The Degree

of

Doctor of Medicine

Submitted

To the Examination

of the

Revd. John Andrews D.D. Provost,

The

Trustees and Medical Professors

of the

University of Pennsylvania

On the first Day of April

1844

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In the following pages it is proposed to treat briefly of the Disease called by Doctr Cullen and others Amenorrhea. To this disease the female sex are continually subject after they have arrived at that age at which the Menstrual discharge is instituted; and their constitutions frequently suffer considerable ravages by its continuance. It is then highly necessary that we should be completely acquainted with its causes, symptoms, and cure.

Amenorrhoea, which strictly signifies an absence of

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of the menstrual flux, has been divided into two kinds:

Retention, by which is understood that unnatural state of the system, which exists when the menses do not appear, at their usual or proper period of life. and suppression, which is the stoppage of their periodical return, by any other cause than conception, before that age at which they naturally disappear. This distinction however does not seem to be of much use in leading us to the cure.

It is not possible for us to say, at what period Retention of the menses may occur, as the age at which

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they naturally should appear, varies in different climates and countries, and in different constitutions. In our Climate however the most frequent period of their occurrence is about the fourteenth year. Sometimes they occur much sooner; at other times much later, without their absence producing any symptoms of disease. Neither is it easy for us to say, when we may suspect suppression merely from dates, as the period of their occurrence, and the time of their final cessation, varies considerably in different individuals. They most generally occur periodically every 28

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or 30 days, and continue to flow for two or three days, until their final cessation, which is generally about the 48th or 50th year. These estimates are however far from being uniformly correct, and from them therefore without other circumstances we cannot positively say that a patient labours under suppression.

The most usual causes are —

1. The unusual operation of any one or more of the debilitating passions and emotions, as grief, fear, unsuccessful love, great anxiety &c

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atmosphere, directly after being confined in ball rooms and other crowded assemblies.

3. The repeated and too liberal use of acids

4. Any injuries to the general health from any cause whatever. To these I might add a great many others and particularly the fashionable dresses of the day. Now whether or not these causes acting on the system, will produce at different times both Retention and Suppression, my experience and observation are not such as to enable me to decide but I think it most likely that they do.

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period of life when the menstrual flux begins to flow should command our earliest attention; and our first enquiry should be so directed, as to ascertain the state of the uterus. For in most cases we may suspect Retention as being the cause, or in some degree having a tendency to aggravate the complaint and make it more violent in its nature.

The following symptoms (if appearing about the age of menstruation) will very much add to the confirmation of our suspicions on this point.

A sluggishness and frequent sense of lassitude and debility occurs, at the same time the face

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loses its vivid colour, becomes pale and sometimes of a yellow-ish hue;. The whole body becomes pale and flaccid and the feet and perhaps also a great part of the body becomes affected with aedematous swellings; the breathing is hurried by any quick or laborious motion, and the heart is liable to palpitation and syncope; a headach sometimes occurs, but more certainly pains in the loins, back, and haunches; various symptoms of Dyspepsia appear sometimes attended with a preternatural appetite. This last is a very extraordinary symptom, which has not been hitherto explained. It

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sometimes accompanies every expiration of the Uterine discharge, but frequently appears in the most violent degree in pregnant women. In young women the appetite for lime, rubbish, charcoal, and various absorbents is the most prevalent. Stahl and his followers made great use of this circumstance in supporting their favourite opinion of the vis medicatrix natura. I would be happy if it were in my power, to treat of this disease from my own experience; as it is not I will merely venture to express my opinion of it, and speak of such remedies as may seem best

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Retention depends upon two causes an increased and decreased action. In increased action which appears with quick and tense pulse dry and hot skin and other symptoms of fever it would be proper to bleed a little at a time and repeatedly and give cathartics of a mild and cooling nature untile the force of the arterial action can be moderated.

In Retention depending upon weak action particularly of the uterine vessels, Free tho moderate exercise in the country air, walking, dancing and moderate indulgence in venery (when circumstances do not forbid) have

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have all been recommended. These act by occasioning a more copious determination of blood to the uterus.

I and next to consider the cure of suppression. In entering upon this I must observe that every interruption of the flux after it has once taken place is not to be considered as a case of suppression for the flux upon its appearance, is not always immediately established in its regular course and therefore if an interruption should happen soon after the first appearance or even within the course of the first or perhaps the second year it may be considered as a case of retention, especially when the disease appears with symptoms peculiar to that state. Suppression is attended with various

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symptoms in different parts of the body very commonly arising from the blood which should have passed off by the uterus being determined more copiously to other parts, and very often with such force as to produce hemorrhagy in them. Hence hemorrhagies from the nose, lungs, & stomach, and other parts have appeared in consequence of suppressed menstruation. Besides these there are commonly hysteric and dyspeptic symptoms produced by the same cause, also flushing of the face, nausea, and vomiting, colic pains, with a bound belly, quick and tense pulse, cardialgia, thirst, want of sleep and Dyspnea.

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The remedies used in this disease are numerous. I will mention a number of those which have been reputed most successful.

Of warm bathing applied to the region of the Uterus Dr Cullen seems to think very favourably, and has ranked it foremost in his list of remedies. But I should not think it safe to rest the cure, on bathing alone, tho' it may be a very important auxiliary to blood letting purging &c. &c

Dr Mead recommended the tincture of black Hellebore in very high terms. He gave it in doses of two tea spoonfuls a day. In the practice of other reputable medical men it has been given as

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recommended by Mead and even enlarged to four tea spoon fulls a day without affording the least relief.

Compressing the crural artery, has been spoken of in very favourable terms. On the recommendation of Dr. Hamilton, Dr Thomas made six trials or more, with Tourniquets passed round the thighs, making compression sufficient to impede in part the passage of the blood to the lower extremities, and in that way cause turgescence in the vessels of the uterus. This mode of treatment no doubt accords with the theory of many. But a remedy should always be estimated in proportion to its efficacy in preventing, relieving

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and curing diseases, when tested by experience. In the six cases in which Dr Thomas tried the effect of this practice, one only of the number was attended with success, which is a very small proportion, and is not sufficient to support the character of any remedy. From the effects of compression as described by Doctr Thomas, it has the strongest appearances of loading the vessels of the uterus with blood, as the symtoms are similar to those which indicate the approach of the menstrual flux. Indeed this remedy does so plausible that many Physicians were sanguine in the

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belief that it would succeed; but this was not the case. The uterus I imagine is often in too plethoric and inflammatory a state; consequently in all such cases this remedy will prove to be hurtful, and should never be resorted to. The good effects of venesection Pediluvium, and purges are strong proofs of it. Who in particular cases arising from inanition and debility with decayed arterial action, I should think it peculiarly well adapted, and should be had recourse to in all such cases where the more common remedies do not succeed.

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very highly of the efficacy of Madder in producing the courses, at a very early period. Dr Home has favoured us with a statement of 15 or 20 cases which he treated with madder, in divided doses, to the extent of four or six drachms a Day, which was preceded by the exhibition of an emetic. Home represents this practice as being most successful, as being preferable to almost any other.

But it appears quite probable that he has spoken of its efficacy as an emmenagogue, in termes too favourable, and not made that allowance for the for the influence of the emetic on the patient,

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which he ought to have done. With Doctor Hamer it was a newly discovered remedy, and it is too often the case, that we see recent discoveries in medicine as well as in all other science, spoken of in termes to exalted and extravagant.

Sabina or Savin. This is notorious for its powerful effects on the Uterus. It is often used to procure abortions; and is said to endanger the life of those who use it, with that design, by the violent Hæmorrhage which it provokes. In many countries it is not allowed to be sold unless it be by the order of a Physician. It would be a favourable

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and healthy circumstance for the citizens of the United States, were such a rule rigourously adhered to with this and many other medicines of the kind, that are too often resorted to, by persons who are ignorant of medicine. It has been much used to promote natural birth, and is reputed a strong Emmenagogue even when applied externally to the skin.

Notwithstanding the power of this medicine, it has been used by many authors with the happiest success, in cases of amenorrhoea, in doses of ℥ss to ℥i of the powder, two or three times a day; but

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I should suppose it most prudent to begin with smaller doses, and increase gradually to the quantity that the patient will be able to take with safety.

Electricity. By passing shocks through the region of the uterus. Doctr Duncan and others have been very successful in the treatment of suppression of the menses. The well known power that electricity has, in restoring sensibility and the power of motion, to other parts induces me to think very favorably of its use, in certain cases of Amenorrhoea, such as depend upon great debility and prostration of strength.

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Bloodletting. The admirable effects of this remedy in suppression of the Menses, have been witnessed by all who have used it when the pulse and other symptoms did not forbid its use. I believe that ten in twelve cases of amenorrhoea, will require the use of the lancet in small but frequent quantities. This remedy is of primary importance, but a proper application of it will require our strictest attention to the pulse and other symptoms.

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The conclusion of this short and imperfect Essay gives me an opportunity of tendering my thanks to the Professors of this Institution, for the advantages I have derived from their lectures. To Professors Barton and Coxe I will allways feel a pleasure, in offering acknowledgements for attentions and politeness, much greater than I had a right to expect.

Among the sensations arising in my mind I cannot suppress my regret at leaving the University and bidding my public Instructors in Medicine Adieu!

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